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U.N. personnel plan scored as spies' entree

By Bill Gertz
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A proposal to lift a hiring freeze at the United Nations will allow Soviet bloc nations to send new workers — some using their employment as a cover for espionage — to New York, according to U.S. officials.

Sen. Bob Kasten, Wisconsin Republican, called the plan by U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar an "outrage" and said in an interview that the rotation of Soviet bloc personnel constitutes "a clear threat to the national security of our country."

An administration intelligence official also said the plan appears part of a Soviet KGB intelligence service effort to return some of the 80 senior KGB and military GRU officers expelled from the country en masse last fall.

Mr. Kasten, in floor remarks prepared for delivery this morning, outlined what he termed the Soviet exploitation of the U.N. personnel system and hinted that the action could lead to a cutoff of U.S. funds, currently 25 percent of the overall U.N. operating budget.

Under the proposed U.N. plan, the secretariat would hire some 40 additional employees and permit the rotation of about 45 Soviet bloc nationals into the secretariat to replace returning workers whose contracts are due to expire, Mr. Kasten said.

"The secretary of state should make absolutely clear to the U.N. secretary-general that the proposed exceptions to the U.N. hiring freeze are completely unacceptable and cannot be implemented without having disastrous consequences on the level of U.S. support for the U.N.," Mr. Kasten stated.

Mr. Kasten, a member of the Appropriations subcommittee responsible for State Department budgeting, also urged Secretary of State George Shultz to demand that the Soviets end the practice of using the secretariat as "an extension of Soviet bloc foreign ministries or intelligence services."

According to Mr. Kasten, Mr. Perez de Cuellar met twice in recent weeks with Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksander A. Bessmertnykh in what the senator described as "unparalleled Soviet pressures" to permit the personnel rotation.

Francois Giuliani, a U.N. spokesman, declined to comment on proposed Soviet bloc personnel rotation, but denied that Mr. Perez de Cuellar was pressured by the Soviet Union to do anything. He said the new employees were specialists needed by the secretary-general.

Last year, in an effort to curb Soviet spying,

U.S. security officials ordered a reduction in the number of Soviet diplomats posted to U.N. missions from 275 to 170 in six-month increments until April 1988.

The latest reduction occurred in March, when the Soviets cut the number of their diplomats to 187 prior to the April 1 deadline.

U.S. intelligence sources estimate that about 100 of the approximately 300 U.N. administrative personnel are professional intelligence officers.

Unlike diplomats, secretariat personnel must be "international civil servants" who are not connected to any foreign government, according to the U.N. Charter. However, when the United Nations was set up in 1945, fixed-term workers from Soviet bloc ministries were permitted to join the secretariat staff as an inducement for the Soviets to join. The Soviets also were allowed three missions representing the Soviet Union, Byelorussia and the Ukraine.

Mr. Kasten said he opposed the U.N. hiring plan since it appeared to be a violation of the secretariat's own cost-cutting measures. Also, hiring fixed-term workers — known as "secondment" — violates U.N. secretariat rules against hiring government officials, which provides the Soviets with "musical chairs" for replacing their intelligence agents, he said.

"Under the secondment arrangement, the Soviets only come to the U.N. secretariat under the sponsorship of their government," one U.S. official said. "They are on TDY [temporary duty] assignments from the Foreign Ministry or the KGB. They live in the Soviet compound and kick back some of their salary to the Soviet government."

John C. Whitehead, deputy secretary of state, in a letter to Mr. Kasten confirmed that the secretary-general will allow the Soviets to bring in new personnel.

"On learning of the possibility that the U.N. might lift the hiring freeze, ... we were, of course, very concerned," Mr. Whitehead stated. "Given the importance of the reform process to the effectiveness of the U.N., we would view these developments as a very serious problem."

Mr. Whitehead said the State Department wants "real reform" in the United Nations before full U.S. funding can be restored in the fiscal budget.

The U.N. secretary-general was called by Mr. Shultz May 6, and promised to withhold action on the hiring ban until Mr. Perez de Cuellar returns from a trip to China, scheduled to end May 21.